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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN'S CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROPOSAL

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to center their September 27 reporting on Premier Su Tseng-chang's plan to confer with major political party leaders for a settlement of the current political stand-off; and on the follow-on movements of former DPP Chairman Shih Ming-teh's campaign to oust President Chen Shui-bian. News coverage also focused on the second presidential recall motion, which was put onto the legislative agenda Tuesday; and Shinzo Abe's succession to Junichiro Koizumi as Japan's new prime minister. In addition, most newspapers carried the Presidential Office's statement of Tuesday saying that President Chen's remarks on constitutional reform Sunday were simply a call for the public to give serious consideration to the issue and did not exceed his 'Four Nos' pledge. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's largest-circulation daily, ran a banner headline on page two that read "Ma Breaks His Word; Arms Procurement Bill and Control Yuan Members' Appointments are Blocked Again."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" analysis said the United States is watching closely whether President Chen will step over the red line in constitutional reforms. An analysis in the pro-unification "United Daily News" said Washington was talking to the Taiwan leader using the "lowest" [i.e. minimum] standard. If Chen fails to keep his promise, the article said, it would mean that he is not capable of leading Taiwan and will thus fail the U.S. test. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said the United States is "sick and tired of handling crises brought about by Chen's ceaseless efforts to alter the status quo in the Taiwan Strait." End summary.

A) "Leaders Should Not Lead to Play [i.e., Frivolously]; United States is Watching Closely the Red Line of Taiwan's Constitutional Reforms"

Washington correspondent Nadia Tsao wrote in an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] (9/27):

"The United States is clearly aware that, with pan-Blue legislators occupying a majority of the seats in the Legislative Yuan, the chances are slim for the constitutional reform proposal tossed off by President Chen Shui-bian to be passed. But the State Department's remarks on September 25 indicated that the United States has told Chen in plain language that, as a state leader, [he] must not toy with any constitutional reform proposal that touches on the 'Four Nos' pledge, even if it is only for domestic consumption.
..."

"The U.S. side believes that, while it is understandable that the DPP or others desire to use constitutional reforms to create internal political energy for the party, Chen, as the state leader of the Republic of China and the leader of the ruling party, who has

guaranteed to AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt that he would adhere to his 'Four Nos' pledge, should not just go ahead and lead the DPP to make constitutional reform proposals. Nor can the U.S. see any reason for the constitutional reform proposals to be put 'out in the open.' That is why the State Department directly challenged Chen's leadership.

"The initial reaction of the Bush administration remained gentle. But when it comes to 'watching [Chen's] next step,' if the constitutional reform proposal presented by the DPP Executive Committee on October 4 still insists on stepping over the red line identified by the U.S., perhaps Washington's reaction will become relentless."

B) "United States [Uses] the Lowest Standard to Test Bian [to See If He Can] Fulfill [His] Pledge"

Washington correspondent Vincent Chang noted in an analysis in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (9/27):

"... This time, Chen Shui-bian, using the same approach as he used when ordering the 'cessation of the National Unification Council' a few months ago, crossed the 'Four Nos' red line, which he had guaranteed to the United States innumerable times that he would not overstep; then, after being criticized by the United States, Chen returned, one step at a time, to where he had started. The U.S. State Department demanded that Chen fulfill his pledge of 'not permitting the constitutional reform process to touch on territory' and emphasized particularly that this is a pledge Chen has made 'repeatedly.' Obviously, the State Department has grown very impatient with A-Bian's unreasonable actions. Besides, the most interesting part of the State Department's remarks was that it linked the question of whether A-Bian is able of keeping his promise to the question of whether he is capable of leading Taiwan and protecting its interests.

"Keeping one's promise is the minimum ethical [standard] that the general public requests. The fact that the State Department talked to Taiwan's leader using the minimum standard seems to imply that, if A-Bian fails to stick to his pledge, he is incapable of leading [Taiwan] and will thus fail the U.S. 'test.' ..."

C) "Another Useless Proposal"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (9/27):

"... We find it hard to believe that with all of the serious problems facing his government right now, the only thing that President Chen can come up with is a silly proposal for changing the Constitution. ... It seems that every time a crisis erupts, President Chen can only pander to extreme pro-Taiwan independence groups by promising to make more strides toward severing his government's links to the Chinese nation. ... While these actions may impress a minority of ardent Taiwan independence supporters, they have done nothing to address substantial issues of governance that President Chen's administration was elected to tackle. Perhaps even worse, even our friends in the United States are becoming visibly frustrated with President Chen's antics. ..."

"The very fact that the U.S. government is publicly rebuking President Chen shows that American officials are sick and tired of handling crises brought about by Chen's ceaseless efforts to alter the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. ... While the United States still publicly expects President Chen to keep his promises, we believe Washington has long ago ceased to trust the president to keep his word. ..."

WANG